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INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 6930
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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2006

In Today's Papers

The Cartoon Crisis
Hurriyet, Sabah, Milliyet, Radikal, Cumhuriyet and others:
Violent protests continued yesterday over the cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed, claiming the lives of protesters in Afghanistan, Somali and Lebanon. Turkish PM Erdogan and Spanish PM Zapatero issued a joint statement yesterday calling for calm and respect. Turkey is holding talks with the UN, EU and OIC to defuse the tension. The OIC's Parliamentary Union is scheduled to meet in Turkey in April to discuss ways to prevent similar controversies. Foreign Minister Gul raised concerns by stating 'I am sad to say during the past few years hostility against Muslims started replacing anti-Semitism. Freedom of the press exists in Turkey but that does not mean that everyone can write without limits and insult others'. Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Annan called on Muslims to accept

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apologies offered over published cartoons and act with calm and dignity. The US Embassy in Ankara released a press statement yesterday saying that cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed were offensive and morally repugnant. The press release also emphasized the US recognition of freedom of expression.

Commenting on the ongoing cartoon crisis, Turkish writers expressed varied opinions. In mainstream Milliyet, Hasan Cemal emphasized that fanatics have gained momentum after the events. "Any radical trying to create a clash between Islam and the West must be very happy now. The cartoon issue demonstrates that freedom can sometimes manifest itself as a form of racism against a particular faith. But the incidents taking place in the Islamic world also show that the reaction has been hijacked by those willing to use violence," he noted.

In Radikal retired diplomat Gunduz Aktan observed the essence of the issue as racism. "In the aftermath of 9/11, racist sentiment against Muslims, and in this context Turks, soared dangerously in Europe due to Al-Qaeda's terrorism. Politicians and the press adopted disparaging rhetoric toward Muslims, and far-right parties gained ground. European societies and politics have shifted toward racism. Denmark has been no exception to this," he commented.

Examining the complexities of the issue, Yeni Safak columnist Kursat Bumin wrote that it would be unnecessary to wait for an apology from Danish government. "Many people in Islamic countries are protesting against the cartoons by burning Danish diplomatic facilities. Can we really say that the Danish government is being punished by this type of action? Why should the government be held responsible for an irresponsible act of the media? Similarly, the fact that the British media decided not to print the cartoons was not a decision made at the recommendation of the British government," the columnist asserted.

Investigation of Priest's Killing in Turkey

All papers: Turkey intensified its efforts to find the murderer of a Catholic priest in Trabzon. Police distributed the drawings of the suspect widely. It is not clear yet whether the shooting is linked to the publishing of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. Foreign Minister Gul said yesterday that he thinks the two incidents are not linked and it was entirely an individual act. However, while expressing sadness over the killing, PM Erdogan suggested there could be a link. Responding to press questions after a meeting of the Council of Ministers,

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government spokesman and Justice Minister Cicek was quoted as saying "we don't approve of the exercise of freedom of expression in an irresponsible way but nor do we approve of violent reactions against the cartoons offending Islam. These violent reactions do not comply with Islam because Islam stands for peace." Minister Cicek urged the Turkish people to remain calm and called on international organizations to meet their responsibilities in ending this tension.

Iran: Tehran Remarks/Rumsfeld Remarks

Cumhuriyet, Milliyet: Tehran announced on Monday after Iran was reported by the UN's nuclear watch dog to the UN Security Council that his country does not foresee entering into nuclear negotiations with the US. In an interview with the German financial newspaper Handelsblatt, Rumsfeld said that the US does not rule out using military force against Iran; all options, including military ones, are on the table.

Diyarbakir Mayor Baydemir's Visit to the US

In Radikal, veteran columnist Hakki Devrim criticized press reporting on the visit of the mayor of Diyarbakir to the US, calling it unprofessional journalism and sensationalistic. Meanwhile, television reports Mayor Baydemir's statement to press in Washington that his visit was not sponsored by the US Government and that he did not travel to the US to express any complaints about Turkey but rather to express his views on the Kurdish issue.

TV Highlights:

In the case of the murder of a Catholic priest in Trabzon, a 16-year old boy was taken for interrogation.

In the midst of ongoing debate, Prime Minister Erdogan has decided to disclose his and Mrs. Erdogan's assets. The information was placed on the Prime Ministry's web site.

Diyarbakir Mayor Baydemir says he is in the US to express

his views on Kurdish issue.

WILSON